

Talking to Kids About School Violence

Going back to school can be stressful for kids, and not just because they don't want to do homework after their carefree summer days. With school violence in the news, your kids may be worried about their safety. School violence includes not only the use of guns, but also bullying, gang activity, theft, and any behavior that victimizes someone, whether teacher, student, or staff. As a parent, you can help make your child's re-entry to school as easy as possible by listening to their concerns, and helping them regain a sense of control.

•Talk to your children. Research shows that kids want to discuss violence and other difficult issues with parents. Initiate age-appropriate conversations with your kids about violence, and remain aware of where they receive information about violence. For example, children five and under should avoid daily news broadcasts, if possible, as they might be overly distressed by the graphic images; if they are exposed, give them simple explanations and avoid euphemisms. Children aged six-twelve can watch the news with their parents, and discuss their feelings; they should also be encouraged to be friendly to other children and tell parents or teachers if they are afraid that classmates are excessively angry or unhappy. Parents of older children can discuss the consequences of violence, and encourage kids to participate in anti-violence groups; these young people should also be encouraged to discuss their concerns about fellow students.

•Create an open environment so that your child knows that he or she can discuss fears with you. Though you certainly can set aside a special time to talk, you do not have to arrange a family meeting to discuss school violence; many times are appropriate for discussing difficult subjects, including during casual conversations.

•Teach kids to recognize feelings of anger in themselves so that they can learn to stop their own aggressiveness; remind them that though their own feelings may sometimes be surprising, they can control their resulting behavior. Discuss ways they can calm themselves down, such as deep breathing, or visualization exercises.

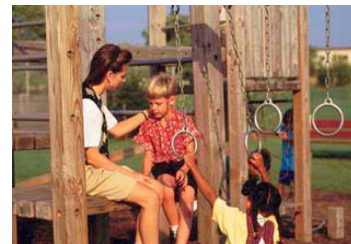
•Children need to understand that sometimes, it is important to tell an adult if they suspect that a peer may have violent tendencies; indeed, violence can not only frighten children, but can leave them feeling guilty for not preventing it. Point out to them that speaking to a trusted adult regarding fears about potential violence is not tattling; it could save lives. By learning to recognize signs of violence in others, children can regain a sense of control. Potential signs of violence include the following: threats or plans for violence, absence of anger-control skills, cruelty to animals, bringing weapons to school or talking about doing so, increased risk-taking behavior, failure to respect others' rights and feelings, isolation from family and friends, bullying, and misplaced jealousy.

•Control your own angry behavior and practice peaceful conflict resolution; kids learn by example.

•Enforce rules about weapons, such as not carrying them or playing with them. Check with other parents about whether or not there is a gun in their home before you let your kids play there.



Most of all, it is important to stay involved in your child's life. Spending time with him or her-reading aloud, helping with homework, etc.-will increase his or her sense that you are available. If your school has a violence prevention organization, get involved; ask about starting one, if none exists. Though there is no magic solution for ending violence, creating an open environment and learning about the causes of school violence can increase yours and your child's sense of control, and might even save lives.



Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provided by APS Healthcare is committed to "Helping People Lead Healthier Lives." If you are experiencing personal stress or anxiety, let the EAP help you find solutions. The EAP is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at toll-free 1- 800-0770.



Additional References

<http://www.talkingwithkids.org/violence.html>
<http://helping.apa.org/warningsigns/controlling.html>
http://www.apbnews.com/newscenter/indepth/columbine/1999/04/20/safeschools0420_01.html
<http://www.securityworld.com/community/statistics/schoolviolence.html>
<http://www.rppi.org/ps234.html>

